

## CHAPTER VII

### NEW ROAD MAPS BEYOND DISAFFILIATION

In a recent issue of *America Magazine*, I found the following:

“In a pastoral message released in December 2020, Cardinal Gerald Lacroix of the Archdiocese of Quebec announced a *dramatic transformation in how the Catholic Church in the province should understand itself*. Faced with declining resources and a faithful but increasingly small cohort of weekly Mass attendees—between two and eleven percent of the province, according to *The Economist* in 2016—*Cardinal Lacroix called on the church in Quebec not to struggle to hold on to what it has left but to see itself as a mission church moving outward*. “We must reorient our pastoral teams toward a more intensely missionary activity, *turned toward the people and groups that we join too little*,” the cardinal said.”<sup>1</sup>

The Cardinal’s concerns represent one institutional response to a long-held crisis of the church. He underlines a change in how the church understands itself by *engaging in a more intense missionary activity that turns toward people that “we join too little.”* In that same vein in 2017, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops invited faith leaders from around the country, around thirty-five hundred, to an extraordinary gathering themed, *Convocation of Catholic Leaders: The Joy of the Gospel in America*. It was an opportunity to respond to Pope Francis’ call from his Apostolic Exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel*. It was envisioned to embark upon a new chapter of “new evangelization,” to understand the realities of Catholicism in America and to re-dedicate ourselves as “missionary disciples.”

There were two outcomes in the gathering hoped for in the challenging times we live in today. The first was to equip and re-invigorate leaders to what it means to evangelize in the country's context today. Second, an effort was designed to take insights into strategic conversations in the many local dioceses of the United States. The challenges offered in the *Joy of the Gospel* were underlined in this way: “The bishop’s mission is to ...foster pastoral dialogue, out of a desire to listen to everyone and not simply to those who would tell him what he would like to hear. The principle aim of these processes should not be church organization but rather the missionary aspiration of reaching everyone.” (*Evangelii Gaudium (Joy of the Gospel)*, 33).

Like the church in Quebec, Pope Francis emphasized new thinking: “I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their communities.” (*EG*, 33) In studying the Catholic context of America today, a key figure in understanding the reality shows that around

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<sup>1</sup> Dean Dettloff. “Catholics in Quebec are leaving the church in droves. Can reinventing parish life save it?” *America Magazine*, February 25, 2021. <https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2021/02/25/catholic-church-quebec-reinventing-parish-life-240097>

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twenty-three percent of Catholics attend mass weekly, even though this figure is twelve years old and is most likely, lower today, mainly because of Covid. Essentially, most Catholics overall disconnected or absent from our parish communities is most striking to many, yet, as this study expresses, this has been a growing reality for decades. Of the twenty-two peripheries named in the gathering that we studied more closely, it was the “rise of the Nones and an understanding of inactive and disconnected Catholics that was significant to me.”<sup>2</sup>

### From New Evangelization to Pre-Evangelization

Outreach to those who left the church behind in their lives has picked up pace in recent years under a new nuanced understanding of contemporary evangelization called the *new evangelization*. The bishops write on their website: “While our current historical moment represents a crisis in the life of the Church, it is also a beautiful invitation, a *kairos* for us. It is serving as a summons to smart and spiritually alert catechists, evangelists, and witnesses, willing to give their lives to the great task before them.”<sup>3</sup>

They are undoubtedly correct to understand this is a crisis for the church, particularly for their families, but not necessarily a felt crisis for those who left. Most disaffiliated feel pretty liberated, as is noted in some of the remarks of chapter five of this study. In my time working with the US Catholic Bishops on their National Advisory Council, this issue assumed a great deal of concern by the conference, particularly in light of the ongoing CARA/St. Mary Press’ study by Robert J. McCarthy and John M. Vitek, *Going, Going, Gone*.<sup>4</sup> The results have spilled over to “New Evangelization” offices in most dioceses throughout the country.

First, a brief understanding of the history of the *new evangelization* is in order.<sup>5</sup> This idea was first used by the Latin American bishops in 1968 in a “Message to the People of Latin America” to address how the Gospel can reach both the elite and the poor equally.<sup>6</sup> The political and social conditions of Latin America resulted in a discernment that the Church must respond to these new situations with a new evangelization, methods that would bring the Gospel of Christ to all people, no matter their condition in life. Pope John Paul II used the concept “New Evangelization” in a sermon while visiting his native country Poland during the first year of his pontificate. He experienced firsthand the tensions between the Church of Poland and the Communist government while he was a

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<sup>2</sup> Participant Guidebook and Journal for Convocation of Catholic Leaders: The Joy of the Gospel in America. (Washington DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2017), 17-22.

<sup>3</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. “Outreach to the Unaffiliated.” <https://www.usccb.org/committees/evangelization-catechesis/outreach-unaffiliated> (accessed March 1, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> This study was referenced earlier in this thesis, the most recent national study to date.

<sup>5</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Catechetical Sunday, September 16, 2012. “What is New about the New Evangelization.” Fr. James Wehner, STD. Rector/President of the Pontifical College, Josephinum. <https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catechesis/catechetical-sunday/new-evangelization/upload/What-is-New-About-Evangelization-2.pdf>. (accessed February 27, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops, Message to the People of Latin America, September 6, 1968, “The Church in the Present Day, Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council,” 22.

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priest, bishop, and cardinal. Therefore, his use of “New Evangelization” recognized opportunities for *evangelization in those tensions*.<sup>7</sup>

In the pastoral exhortation, *Ecclesia in America (1999)*, Pope John Paul II wrote, “The program of a new evangelization . . . cannot be restricted to revitalizing the faith of regular believers but must strive as well to proclaim Christ where he is not known.”<sup>8</sup> Hence, the New Evangelization explains the nature of the Church’s mission: *wherever people are, the Church must be present*. The “New Evangelization” was a developing concept in the pontificate of Pope John Paul II. Today, it is the framework of evangelical understanding in reaching out to those who left the church.

Ecclesial concern stemming disaffiliation research, such as those mentioned in this study, has prompted a project published by St. Mary’s Press, *Beyond Disaffiliation: A Process for Hope-filled Action* by Maura Thompson Hagarty and Ellen B. Koneck.<sup>9</sup> Some parish renewal programs are diocesan-centered and extra-parochial with disaffiliation in mind. It has spawned new research, such as *The Springtide Research Institute*, which tries to understand the distinct ways new generations experience and express community, identity, and meaning.<sup>10</sup> These and perhaps other programs focus on the parish, particularly catechesis and youth and young adults. As important as all of these are, they overlook the family’s principal place where disaffiliation is born, and its dynamics continue. These programs are crucial for the younger generations still with the church, particularly those who feel most alienated within the church.

#### Pre-evangelization and Disaffiliated Families

As one may surmise from this study thus far, reaching out to disaffiliated Catholics with catechesis is ordinarily not realistic. This is because catechesis assumes a relationship with the church, no matter how minimal, and is not a starting point. So, sharing the content of faith and church teaching may be interesting, but as Sherry Weddell says, “...it rolls off like water off a duck’s back.”<sup>11</sup> Mainly because most if not all disaffiliated Catholics have no real relationship with the institutional church. They do, however, with their families.

My familiarity with pre-evangelization coincides intimately with my own missionary experience, which may be understood as a ministry of dialogue. I saw how this dialogue plays out as I served in three continents globally, across faith and cultural borders, and religious and secular worldviews. Thus, even though this initial stage in evangelization is unknown in parishes, it is well known in missionary work globally and has evolved enormously for the last seventy years.

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<sup>7</sup> John Paul II, “The Cross of Nowa Huta: A New Seed of Evangelization,” Homily, June 9, 1979, L’Osservatore Romano, English Edition, July 16, 1979.

<sup>8</sup> John Paul II, On the Encounter with the Living Jesus Christ: The Way to Conversion, Communion, and Solidarity in America [Ecclesia in America] [EA], no. 74, [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_22011999\\_ecclesia-in-america\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_22011999_ecclesia-in-america_en.html). (accessed March 1, 2021).

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.smp.org/product/5927/Beyond-Disaffiliation-A-Process-for-Hope-Filled-Action>

<sup>10</sup> Dr. Josh Packard, Executive Director. *The Springtide Research Institute*. <https://www.springtideresearch.org/>.

<sup>11</sup> Sherry Weddell. *Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus* (Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, 2012). Kindle Edition, 125.

In 1951, Pierre-Andre Liege introduced the term “pre-evangelization” in the French publication *Catholicisme*. He stressed this in mission areas where there are peoples of other faiths and traditional beliefs. *Here, we needed to share our faith that was “accessible” and that made sense in local religious, cultural, and social realities.* This helped to strengthen the need for inculturation throughout Vatican II’s challenges up to the present. A national catechetical gathering in Bangkok formally recognized the term “pre-evangelization.” For the first time, they defined a three-step process in the experience of “conversion”: *pre-evangelization, evangelization, and catechesis proper.* The initial stage was a necessary experience of trust and openness in a multifaith reality, as is expected in interfaith dialogue. It is a stage of deep respect for each other’s worldview, a time of listening and understanding, and sharing each other’s lives of faiths in a non-judgmental approach.<sup>12</sup>

In a like manner, this engagement with each other’s faith, sense of belonging, and meaning in families with very different viewpoints about the institutional church takes place not within the parish or in church structures. Still, the family and the post-secular world, the family is embedded. This pluralism within the family, reflective of the more considerable pluralism in the post-secular culture we abide in, needs a way to mitigate the anxiety it produces and to both find common ground and honor crucial differences where God is present in all of them. Pre-evangelization provides an opportunity of connecting meaningfully intergenerationally. However, it also affirms the church’s responsibility to those who left, which does not stop merely because they are not in the parish anymore.

More fundamentally, we need to consider this paradigm that witnesses the power of God and the centrality of Christ both within the institutional church and outside of it. We are always to negotiate the tensions between the forces of tradition and those of change. Since ancient Christianity, we have always needed to forge new directions in language, doctrinal thinking, and institutional practices that find greater resonance with the lived experiences of contemporary Catholics in America.<sup>13</sup>

Whether continuing their Catholic faith practice in a parish community, Catholics do not compartmentalize their secular roles and experiences from their church participation. In our modernity, post-secular Catholicism recognizes the mutual relevance of the religious and the secular and their tensions. The extraordinary diversity in spirituality and morals makes the secular offers many.<sup>14</sup> What are some central issues that come in this pre-evangelical dialogue?

#### Questions Arising out of Dialogue

Through the narratives shared in this study of affiliate Catholic parents and disaffiliated children, what is certain is that questions surrounding Catholic families in the intergenerational transmission of faith are some of the most critical questions of the church today. Both parents and their children and grandchildren have expressed those questions and concerns to some extent in this study. In addition, I heard heartfelt

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<sup>12</sup> Tamra Hull Fromm. *Pre-Evangelization and Young Adult “Native Nones:” A New Paradigm for Reaching the Unchurch.* (Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2021), 40-41.

<sup>13</sup> Dillon, Kindle Edition, 1-2.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

experiences in the life stories, and reasons to both remain in the church and leave church practice in their own words – directly, candidly, and without filters.

Like other qualitative studies in the departure of many from other institutional faiths, I found myself amazed at the sense of faith that transcends church organization and the constant search for authenticity in our open conversations. At the same time, despite the differences expressed in these Catholic families, they also showed how to firmly but lovingly disagree about the things that matter the most.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, they have not stopped talking or caring for each other, which makes the Catholic family and the experience of disaffiliation a unique center of this dialogue and understanding in the changing landscape of the Catholic faith.<sup>16</sup>

#### From Dialogue to New Road Maps

Catholics who wrestle with their children’s disaffiliation and their children who wrestle with the church carry some anxieties. What is going on in our society at large that shapes our parish communities and their families? What are young people’s spiritual and religious needs, and where are they met if not within the church? What can we learn from innovative *third spaces*<sup>17</sup> that are attracting our younger generations? How can parishes resource and support families in this dialogue? How can families sustain an ongoing, lifelong conversation where everyone is learning and growing, whether in the church or outside of it?<sup>18</sup>

The image of new road maps in Maura Thompson and Ellen Koneck’s guide on looking beyond disaffiliation is quite helpful. If we were to consider pastoral practice and how we think about faith in the families and how religion is passed onto new generations, we rely on certain assumptions that are pretty traditional. It involves the sacramental preparation and reception of the sacraments of initiation, their ongoing involvement in the parish, and for some, Catholic education in one form or another. Consequently, it is assumed they, in turn, will do the same for their children. These are the maps we currently rely upon.

The fundamental question is, do these maps reflect the terrain that is no longer recognizable? They may for some, but for many others do not. When has anyone interrogated these maps and the assumptions behind them? I can name forty-five Catholic parents who have been doing just that, which you can conclude from chapter four of this project, even though it was a project they previously did not think they would need to do, at least in hindsight. The project outlined here is a way to re-think those road maps by exploring the contours of the changing landscape.<sup>19</sup>

I would suggest that ongoing dialogue within families, supported with church resources, is a way of thinking about revising old maps, as intimidating as that sounds. It

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<sup>15</sup> Tony Campolo & Bart Campolo. *Why I Left, Why I Stayed: Conversations on Christianity Between an Evangelical Father and His Humanist Son*. (New York: Harper One, 2017), inside cover.

<sup>16</sup> Going, Going, Gone, 7-8.

<sup>17</sup> Third spaces are a term that refers to experiences between religious institutions and secular realities. One of many studies was initiated at Harvard Divinity School in 2015 with Millennials called *How We Gather*.”

<sup>18</sup> Maura Thompson, PhD & Ellen B. Koneck, MAR. *Beyond Disaffiliation: A Process for Hope-Filled Action*. (Minnesota: St. Mary’s Press, 2019), 4.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

is this lifelong dialogue that helps illuminate the needs, longings, and desires of younger generations. At the same time, it also reveals the hopes and concerns of parents and grandparents, who also need to be understood. Pope Francis concludes in his post-synodal letter to young people: “The Church needs your momentum, your intuitions, your faith. We need them! And when you arrive where we have not yet reached, have the patience to wait for us.” (*Christus Vivit*, 299)

#### Pre-Evangelical Dialogue with a Divergent Sense of Identity

The contours of this dialogue in Catholic disaffiliated families are shaped around two different senses of identity that interact with each other. First, parents and grandparents talk of their Catholic identity understood near the parish community, sacramental life, rituals, and prayers. It is part of their identity and value system and lifestyle, even if some may not attend weekly. The traditional perception is that identity is primarily personal and non-negotiable, emerging as a set matrix of characteristics that do not change much after adulthood. Their Catholic identity, formed through many experiences and their children's assumptions, exemplifies this sense of consistent, lifelong identity regarding faith. Who do they understand themselves as Catholics are expressed primarily concerning the Catholic Church and its institutions?<sup>20</sup>

For the disaffiliated, there is a tendency to focus less on identity or not and more on how individuals through the worlds they interact *use identity* to live what they come to think of as good and meaningful lives. In this sense, identity is a process that continues throughout life, at times shifting, and other times not as much. It is a story of one's life that unfolds over time that influences how they live out their lives. Unlike their parents, it is not associated exclusively with the institution of the Catholic Church. This is called *narrative identity*.<sup>21</sup>

It is no wonder that younger Catholics growing up in the faith have little difficulty including other experiences outside of the parish as meaningful spiritual experiences that bear on how they see themselves. However, narrative identity continues to make and unmake itself.<sup>22</sup> When we spoke of this difference in the ways families see their identities and the role of religion in it, one parent tried to understand her atheist daughter by imagining her as a “seeker” to be “authentic” in her way, as much as she disagreed with her choices. For my purposes, authenticity here means there is a coherence of the different elements of one's life across all contexts and relationships. Some of the disaffiliated cannot incorporate specific experiences of their church and what it teaches into the overall narrative of their relationships and experiences without causing a sense of inconsistency. These conversations mainly related to their perceptions of women's leadership in the church, issues around their LGBTQ friends, and clerical sexual abuse scandals. The religious institution's positions or actions in these areas are paradoxical with their overall network of relationships and valued experiences.<sup>23</sup>

On the other hand, the affiliated parents were much more able to *compartmentalize* the church they disagreed with or had questions. They could bracket

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<sup>20</sup> Drescher, 37.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 39.

certain things, like those already mentioned, find other reasons to remain in the church, and not feel they were inconsistent and could still uphold their faith. The most poignant example was parents in the study whose children were abused by a local priest. As difficult as one can imagine, the utter disappointment and anger and sense of betrayal, they continue to find other reasons to remain in the church. There are other resources of the church that still resonate with their needs.

The differences in the connections between Catholic parents and their disaffiliated children shows how different Catholic identity plays in faith choices, meaning, and belonging. It is an enormous challenge for Catholic families that requires the support and resources of church leadership. I show in this study how difficult faith conversations are for families. Yet, the more they share on a faith level, and the more local parishes can support them in this ministry, disaffiliation may be understood more deeply with important lessons for families and parishes.

I wish to reframe the understanding of those who have left the church and the unique position of the Catholic family that stands as a bridge between the church and the larger post-secular culture committed to *pre-evangelical dialogue*. I understand disaffiliation in the Catholic family as an ongoing opportunity of exchange based on love and faith where the church often cannot reach. It is a place where that dialogue is already occurring in all the birthdays, anniversaries, deaths, baptisms, and other family opportunities. These are some of the best “third spaces” where utter honesty, doubt, and continued searching may find a hearing.

I suggest a pre-evangelical paradigm, rather than a new evangelical model as a dialogical model for families living with disaffiliation and maneuvering their extended family lives through several generations. It is not a turning away from religion but the emergence of multiple overlapping and diverse conceptions of what it means to be human, believers in Christ, and children of God in a pluralistic world. I would also suggest further research to look at what a pre-evangelical model could look like in its detail and how it could be used.

There will always be young Catholics, formed in the faith, which will remain in the church, as is undoubtedly the case. There will always be others who feel called to discipleship in Christ in the Catholic tradition. Nonetheless, there are also younger generations, and not so young, still with the church and barely hanging on, at the periphery of our parish communities. The church’s responsibility does not end at the doors of the parish. The family is the church’s extension into the broader post-secular culture we live in, and their support and resource in the unique experience of disaffiliation are vital.

#### Postscript for Families, Clergy, Lay Leadership

How does the church then look beyond disaffiliation, transforming a community’s anxiety into action? Reinhold Niebuhr captures well the advice I would share with families, clergy, and lay leadership today as we respond to the impacts of disaffiliation, with a slight amendment: “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the “data” to know the difference.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ryan P. Burge. *The Nones*. (Fortress Press. Kindle Edition), 128.

### Things We Cannot Change

I think that no matter how hard our parishes have worked at the effectiveness and impact of ministry programming and reach out, for all the extraordinary spiritual opportunities for all our generations, disaffiliation will not be “canceled.” Throughout this project, I have attempted to show that the phenomena of religious disaffiliation and institutional religions’ are all experiencing, including the Catholic Church, are more prominent than any church programming can contain. It stems from experiences of enormous cultural changes in a post-secular world. There is no “silver bullet” or particular program that will turn things around. Instead, the church must learn the language and culture of disaffiliation as it navigates secularity.

Many Americans considered themselves Catholic by default, and not only because of adherence to church teaching and practice. The changes of a post-secular culture like ours gave many the honesty and frankly the courage to express themselves by severing ties with the church or keeping nominal connections at best, with little response from the church. It is not because of a lack of desire for faith in God, Christ, spirituality, prayer, and reach out to our vulnerable neighbors. Secularization and religiosity have grown together for generations now, and both are vital forces in the lives of many Americans. But implicit, spiritual longings have been de-linked from the institutional church. Therefore, we can no longer assume merely because one is born into a practicing Catholic family that that person will continue in the faith.<sup>25</sup> The option of the Catholic faith is precisely that for our younger generations, an option among many and not a default choice.

Denial of this reality is expressed in many ways. A renewed apologetics, a propensity to “turn back the clock,” and raising regrets for the critical claims of Vatican II in our lives are all ways some Catholics use to grapple with our pluralism. The culture wars, which is an ecumenical Christian affair, is the battleground where there are attempts to mitigate enormous cultural patterns that have been going on since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Doubling down on faith traditions and a longing for the hegemony of religious faith, which no longer exists, will somehow render post-secular dynamics impotent. Partisan politics and the upsurge of Catholic integralism<sup>26</sup> encourage some of those who remain in the pews. But it also has been an underlying cause of continued disaffiliation of our younger generations who wonder at the over politicization of the church. Our concern for religious freedom is also symbolic of the multi-cultural and multi-religious realities we are grappling.

### Things We Can Change

The data analysis I did with both generation groups in this study outlined meaningful quotes from all the interviews on tables, labeling them with pseudo names and numbers according to focus group or individual interviews. Yet behind every row on

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<sup>25</sup> Studies in Catholic disaffiliation show that good catechesis and opportunities in Catholic education do not really make a big difference in the realities of disaffiliation. Despite doing all the “right things,” church departures endure. See chapter three and chapter five for more.

<sup>26</sup> Steven P. Millies. “What is Catholic Integralism: One of the Oldest Ideas in Christianity has Come to Renewed Prominence.” *US Catholic*. October 14, 2019. <https://uscatholic.org/articles/201910/what-is-catholic-integralism>. (Accessed March 23, 2021) Catholic integralists believe: “rendering God true worship is essential to [the] common good, and that political authority therefore has the duty of recognizing and promoting the true religion.”



my spreadsheets is a story of a human being to tell. People who grew up in parishes but left them in their emerging adult years have an important story that needs to be heard. Additionally, each Catholic parent or grandparent is also represented in the many interviews that have a different story to tell, equally as important. Both stories, in families that love and support one another hold crucial lessons for us all.

I think that many of us have a challenging time putting ourselves in the shoes of people who have left the church and never came back, or those who worked hard to raise their children in the faith, only to see that different life paths were unexpectedly chosen. For those of us in church leadership, either clergy or lay, who may never have heard these stories or taken them to heart, may look for overly simplified answers and scapegoats of one sort or another. It is to do a great disservice to these people in our ministries and a failure to understand that not everyone comes to faith through belonging to a parish community in the same way.

My own experiences listening to those disillusioned with traditional parish faith for some years in my tradition and in other religious traditions and those who raised their children in that faith have been eye-opening for me. Listening with empathy and without judgment allowed me to understand more deeply the struggle and search for authenticity that these individuals showed. Free of my need to correct or dissuade, I could understand not only why they chose the paths they did but also how much my church could learn from these stories. Pope Francis reminded us that an encounter is an essential place for spiritual experience and church renewal.

We can change our posture of thinking with the only option of inviting people back to the church without really understanding deconversion experiences in the first place, or why they left, or even worse, discount their experiences as unimportant or uninformed. We can also provide more substantial support to parents who struggle with their children's exit from the church with a sympathetic ear and prayer and practical ways to help their families continue conversations and dialogue of faith with their children and grandchildren.

We need to change the idea that creative and innovative programming is required before we can understand the disaffiliation experience and listen to those who left the church. Both understanding disaffiliation and listening deeply to their stories are vital changes we can make. They demand a "pre-evangelical attitude" within the work of the New Evangelization that expresses the humility, gentleness, and listening heart that other bishops have recognized. As we attempt to do this from our parishes, we need to think also of how we support and encourage disaffiliated families where this dialogue has the most possibility. Many have severed their relationships with the parish, but even though their Catholic parents differ, they have not severed connections in the family. Thus, the Catholic family can be the principal place where this dialogue may find resonance.

Finally, this pre-evangelical attitude, crucial in building trust and friendship and new understandings of others and us, is not a new notion. It began with Jesus as he constantly reached out to those outside of his Jewish faith and those of the traditional religion of Rome, like the centurion. Jesus' encounters prodded others to consider new ways of thinking about God's presence in the world. In like manner, the church needs to change the way it thinks about God's presence in the world beyond its institutional borders. Belongingness is not created through programs but relationships. It can only

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occur within this dialogue, as it has occurred with missionaries worldwide in more than two thousand different languages. This dialogue and further research can help us explore new strategies and pathways in the experiences of disaffiliation and pastoral renewal.